

On a Common Wealth

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It is safe to say that economic activities constitute a huge part of our lives. These are so varied in kind that it would take a book rather than an essay to list them, but first, more importantly, they would take the will to perform such a pointless task. I have no intentions of wasting paper to make explicit the endless ways in which economy affects our every decision, but for one: the way in which it characterizes the English language. Linguists agree on the fact that English is an eminently economic language. Therefore, when we attempt to speak of England's economic system in their native tongue, relevant issues such as the wealth of the average English person could suddenly disorientate us because of the slightest typographic mistake.

We may disingenuously dare address the former matter as the common wealth. But what is the common wealth indeed? Is it simply an assemblage of statistics on the income the average person has? That could be the obvious answer to an economist in a hurry. Perhaps, to someone less knowledgeable in the matter it could mean the estate shared by all citizens of the country, or even the cultural heritage. The adjective "common", however, suggests a sense of ordinary, specifying a wealth that has no remarkable rank or position. We could be referring to the wealth of a particular social class, such as the working class. After expressing these thoughts on the matter, my advice would be to clarify beforehand which meaning you have chosen. Otherwise you might find yourself blabbering on the working class' income raise while people wonder what on earth that has to do with England's artistic heritage.

And God forbid you forget the space between the adjective and the noun! Such a stubborn language will never forgive the tiniest mistake to the inexperienced anglophone. It would be a tragic misfortune to change the topic, with no warning whatsoever, from the common wealth to the commonwealth. The original meaning of this noun dates from the 15th century, and refers to public welfare, general good or advantage. At the time, "wealth" meant well-being, which is nowadays an old fashioned sense of the word. Consequently, common wealth is the average income, and commonwealth is the ideal average income. It seems a bit presumptuous to address public welfare by the exact same words that address the income the average man struggles to live on.

Furthermore, the gap between common wealth and commonwealth has widened since the 17th century, when this definition expanded to mean a state in which the supreme power is vested in the people. This problem worsened when in 1949 the association called The Commonwealth of Nations came into being. Believe me when I tell you that nothing about the Commonwealth is common. To begin with, most territories in this association are former colonies from the British Empire. This means that states that once were British colonies decided to maintain a good

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relationship with the country that once had conquered them. Moreover, another extraordinary fact of the Commonwealth concerns the Queen of England. Not only is she the Head of the Commonwealth, but also is considered the monarch of the 16 states that integrate the Commonwealth Realm. It comes across as odd at the very least that sixteen states would willingly decide to name another country's Queen as their own monarch.

I advise you to be well prepared before embarking on such a hazardous task such as writing in English properly. What makes this language so simple and complicated at unison is its ability to create endless layers of meaning with a simple combination of words. Proper grammar lurks below your keyboard keys waiting for that inevitable slip of the finger, just to condemn you for your naive ignorance. You can win at grammar, though. Just remember to write in a clear fashion, to separate your adjectives from your nouns, and to stay away from the caps lock key. Now, if you are interested on investigating the commonwealth of every Commonwealth member, you will just have to look up the statistics of their common wealth. A piece of cake, if you ask me.